

2007

Lucidity

Sarah Rebekah Byrd Mizer
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

© The Author

Downloaded from

<http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1441>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

© Sarah Rebekah Byrd Mizer 2007

All Rights Reserved

LUCIDITY

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

SARAH REBEKAH BYRD MIZER

BFA, New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, 2003

Director: JACK WAX

PROFESSOR OF GLASS, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May 2007

Acknowledgement

First I owe thanks to Sonya Clark; Jack Wax; Susie Ganch and Holly Morrison.

Also I would like to acknowledge Arnold Hall Mizer who passed December ninth, as well as the rest of my family who grieve our loss. I am blessed for many reasons, far too many to list, but all of whom are covered in the definition for home.

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	ii
List of Figures	v
Chapter	
1 Artist Statement	1
2 Pith	2
3 Blessing	4
4 Materialize	8
5 Women and Swarovski encrusted Skulls	10
5 Vita	16

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: <i>Thesis</i> 2007 (detail)	12
Figure 2: <i>Thesis</i> 2007 (detail)	12
Figure 3: <i>Thesis</i> 2007 Installation view	12
Figure 4: <i>Manifest(o)</i> 2006	13
Figure 5: <i>Whayn-did</i> 2006.	13
Figure 6: <i>Manifest(o)</i> 2006 (detail)	13
Figure 7: <i>Whayn-did</i> 2006 (detail)	13
Figure 8: <i>ed-it-ed</i> 2007	14
Figure 9: <i>...3</i> 2007 (detail)	15

Abstract

LUCIDITY

By Sarah Rebekah Byrd Mizer, Master of Fine Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007

Major Director: Jack Wax
Professor of Glass, Craft/Material Studies

This thesis focuses on space, the in-between-ness that exists amidst mental and physical experience. *Pith* explains personal attachments and rooting systems. The thesis continues with *Blessing*, narrating love then loss, and finishes with a recipe for making a tomato sandwich. *Blessing* is followed by *Materialize*, a collective view of cyclical learning and meandering paths. Finally, the paper concludes with a quirky *Women and Swarovski encrusted skulls*, which matter-of-factly lists artists (all of whom happen to be women) whose works I find particularly compelling; and also notes on general trends in art I find interesting in a much less obvious manner. The artwork in *Lucidity* attempts to

manifest an ephemeral, mental space with clarity, light, and shades of white. Both the artwork and the written component have been heavily influenced by my own affirmations of elation, loss, and contentment

Artist Statement

Translucency, subtlety, and serene quiet. These traits are common threads in the work that beg the viewer to slow down, whisper, and listen. A world of rich layering and tactile language unfolds upon the person patient enough to look closely.

Pith

About two hours from Richmond is the center of the world. Just over the mountain are Verona, Mt Sidney, Bridgewater, and Broadway; these places are bountiful and rich; they are my sanctuary, providing an escape, a home cooked meal, a release, and every other weekend luxury. At the pith is family. This is where I heard stories of “cat man” late at night; the first time I heard rain fall on a tin roof; where the first flattened penny was found by the railroad; it was summer adventures, abandoned houses, rolling fields, and winding train tracks.

Here is where my parents had history: their wedding in that yard; that magnolia tree that mom picked from while standing on someone’s gravestone the day of her wedding. It is where they would go for drives as teenagers. A trip to the farm bureau, which I re-named the “town beer,” was our first order of business every morning; riding in back of Big Daddy’s big green Ford, we would go on our ritual drive. It is where things seemed to grow and people seemed to move slower. It is where we all ended up.

It is more than fitting that I come here to Virginia to be educated, though I could not have predicted this. I had no idea the type of education to expect, and even less of a clue as to how it would impact me. I moved to Richmond eighteen months ago. On a

whim, my gut told me to come here. I never cared much about where I lived, never thought I'd feel rooted to one place or another. I was wrong. (There is something in the red Virginia soil that reminds me of my roots.) Something in the air that takes me each morning to my childhood; it is, for me, the smell of my grandmother's farm, of the train tracks behind Grandpa's.

That air makes it to my doorstep every morning. I am thankful for that, grateful that those memories are the first things to be brought to mind so many mornings. With the exception of visiting mom and dad in Foster, I have never felt so at home.

Blessing

God is great,
God is good.
Let us thank Him
For this food.
Amen.

Two seconds start to finish. The blessing said by all Mizer children before meals. Adam, my oldest brother, recently grew up and graduated to a grown up version; that was a big day for us. I have not graduated yet. I still say these simple Thanks every time we gather and, every time, I am slightly embarrassed to do so.

Meals are a big deal. They demarcated our family's days, split them neatly into thirds, and structured my routine for many years. It was a constant: prompt, reliable and nutritious. It was also how we got to know our grandparents, cousins, Aunt, and Uncle. The dinner table provided for me an opportunity to hear stories, learn lessons, and laugh with these people who were a part of me. The conversation never seemed to lack luster. Laughter is contagious and seemingly a favorite Mizer/Koogler/Rountree activity. The many occasions we spent sitting there, sharing there, these were moments where time slipped, and left us in a vacuum...happy, full, and laughing. On many levels, I hold this experience and the memories of everyone at an overcrowded table in the highest regard.

These tables have provided more than food, more than conversation; they have shaped family, as I understand it. Meals aren't about eating; they are about making a moment for people to come together. They are about talking, laughing, loving, and time.

Something happened. Something awful has happened.

Suddenly, I am the size of the tears welling in my eyes. I look to someone but someone is missing.

The locks are different; the notoriously warm house is cold and naked. The sounds are hollow and numb and I feel enormous in this space, too big for it; it changed. The flowerbed is barren, the vegetable patch unattended: right now there is no life in this home.

This chapter has been closed abruptly, with the final exit of breath. All of a sudden, I realize partially that there is something missing, something enormously absent; the absence is severe. I can't seem to stand up straight; I can't seem to take in a deep breath. It's like my skin is on too tight. But, simultaneously, this body feels big; I feel lost inside of my own skin, like I am a giant vessel and somewhere inside the cavernous hollow jar is a minute speck of dust. That is me.

I go outside and the world doesn't look at me differently, so my scale shifts back and I try to continue my day. Nothing seems affected. I feel suspiciously separated from this routine; emotionally, landslides took me away from whatever I was doing a minute ago. I don't understand fully what to do. Do I cry? Do I sleep? Do I continue what I was doing? Do I talk about this? Nothing feels right; nothing seems adequate. I feel disjointed and alone, as if I just walked away from a fatal car wreck. I am a fatal car wreck but I have no physical proof.

I feel isolated inside of myself.

A few weeks pass. Grandpa's dining room table, at which so many memories were formed, has somehow ended up in front of me again. It has been arranged in a weird way, but, still it's familiar...so much a part of me. I know that chair, the vastly empty chair. The space that chair is holding is profoundly larger than the house that holds the chair. I sit in it and, immediately, I am young, too young to understand missing, too young to understand sadness, but not too young to understand love and family. I do not fill the chair.

Mealtime always meant filling grumbling bellies, lots of grumbling, high-pitched bellies. The kids were eager and expected what they knew should be coming: food that had history to it, food that was rich with love and care and skill, food that was only right when a certain two people made it. Simple ingredients, combined, can teach lessons on life, key ingredients that hold value long after they are consumed. There are two staples on which I will base my thesis, two unsuspected staples which perfectly combine. Enter the tomato and the dinner roll.

How to make a tomato sandwich: pick one tomato from Grandpa's sun soaked garden, slice it into half inch slices, take one of Grandmother's fresh warm rolls cut into halves, spread mayonnaise on either side, add one tomato slice, salt and pepper to taste, sandwich the tomato, and eat.

Sounds simple, I know, and it is. There is a catch; it isn't as easy as it sounds. The real main ingredients here are not the tomato and the roll, but rather the people who have provided the ingredients. They have over 100 years of experience combined of routinely

working on what might seem a simple task. Their experience and location have created something irreplaceable, something unable to be duplicated. The sandwich is a metaphor for art making which isn't necessarily the most difficult thing to do but it is done with care.

I'd give anything for one of those tomato sandwiches. It was the perfect definition for bliss. Eating one usually meant I was in Verona or Mt Sidney; it usually meant I was surrounded by family; it usually meant it was sunny, hot, and I had nothing to do. Eating one meant Grandpa was alive, it meant Grandmother didn't have a Brita Filter and arthritis hadn't taken over her hands. Eating one sometimes meant Grandma was there and Big Daddy too.

The universe can't combine like that again. That is the beauty of it, the rarity, the value, and the bliss of having eaten it. That is art.

Materialize

Grandpa methodically tended to his garden; for more than my lifetime, he sewed a plot of land and turned it into something unique, beautiful, rich, and fragrant: saturated with life, full of gifts to give others. Mom's mom made rolls like second nature, no measure, no recipe; she just knew exactly how much of this and that it took to make bread, humble and plenty. Their making made an impression on me, resonated...and reminds me that what I do is not to be boastful, as the most highest value is to give singularly, one on one, to anyone and everyone. I give what I know: this is my bread, my garden, and, although I don't know if it is as consistently fruitful, I'll share for anyone and everyone who comes close enough to look; there is substance there for them.

This is what I have learned here, in Richmond. For the past two years, I have invested the time to reflect upon what I find most meaningful. This, I am sure has to do with location and losing my Grandpa. Sadness has engulfed what seems like large portion of my time. Loss is inevitable and cyclical, but nonetheless wrenching when grieving. Being here in so special a place, just a short distance from the center of the world, has been uplifting, enlightening, and fun. Being in such close proximity to my roots has taught me about myself, and granted me the opportunity to spend time with people whose lives have silently been impacting me all along. Things do happen for a reason and I am not even a little bit unclear of mine.

In making art, I don't want to ever "have a process." Instead, I look at making like walking on Grandmother's and Big Daddy's farm, walking back to the bluff, seeing what it had to offer then going further, finding the abandoned houses, and going further to another creek. Stopping all along the way to look closely at whatever sparked interest. I like to think this way I will always be curious about what is over the next hill. And even when I turn back for dinner, it is impossible to go the same exact way twice.

Space and location have been and continue to be driving my need to move on. I no longer look to map my presence as I was so invested in two years ago. Instead, I am very much grounded and at peace with where I am. So, my work tries to capture the phenomenal space, which reflects my gratitude, my peace, and my silent contentment in the simple act of breathing in, every morning, the air of my family. This inner peace and meditative aesthetic often conflicts with cynicism and over zealous need for justice (through my lens) and equality. And so I write.

I write because I believe in my hand. I believe that words are just noise unless eloquently combined. I believe that art can be good, benevolent. I believe that poetry is the most succinct way of reaching people because it takes interaction and thought. I believe that art can be as successful as poetry, so I write in glass.

Women and Swarovski encrusted skulls

I was just chatting with a visiting artist and, when discussing themes and goals in my work, I explained I am much more Ann Hamilton and Mona Hatoum than I am Jenny Holzer. Cursive, never caps!

Most of what informs my work is conceptual or emotional. However, when looking at artists who have what it is I am trying to get, “it”, more often than not, refers to spatial charge, emotional charge, or downright transcendence. That being said, some artists I enjoy putting my name next to are: Ann Hamilton, Doris Salcedo, Eva Hesse, Rachael Whiteread, Mona Hatoum and Ayse Erkman. (And whoever made the Swarovski encrusted skull: it was at an art fair so I don’t remember who or where, but I do remember the piece.)

I don’t think it is all coincidence that this list is constructed solely of women; someone’s list has to be! All of these women make (made) work that I see as empathetic. The highly sensitive and often subtle work is commanding and ghostly. Time is apparent in viewing their work as well, whether it is stale, reminiscent, or anxious; I often feel uncomfortable, slightly off, or sometimes nostalgic. They seem to play with our understandings of objects and time, and what is created is an intangible emotional space.

Looking at Mona Hatoum's "*Mobile Home*" last December in NY, where I saw *Undercurrent* for the first time, silenced me. The pieces had everything I described earlier, quietly commanding fierce attention; they made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. That is good art.

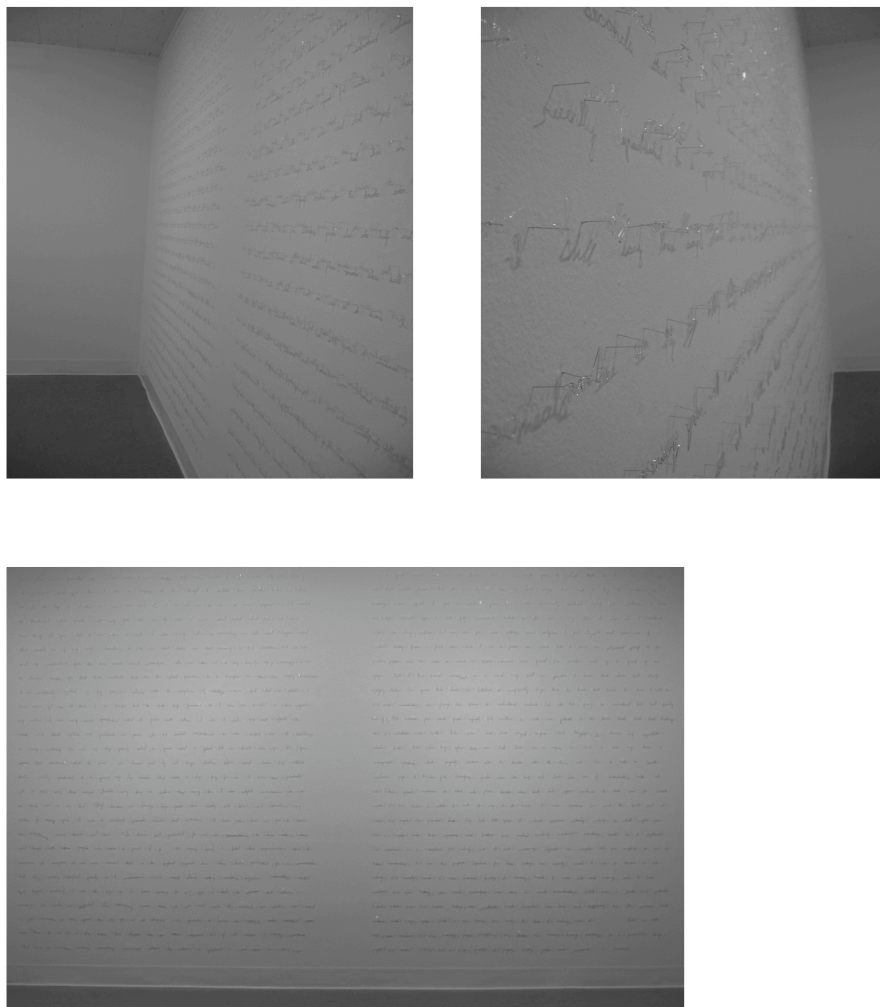


Fig. 1 & 2
Thesis, 2007 (detail)
Fig. 3
Thesis, 2007
Installation view

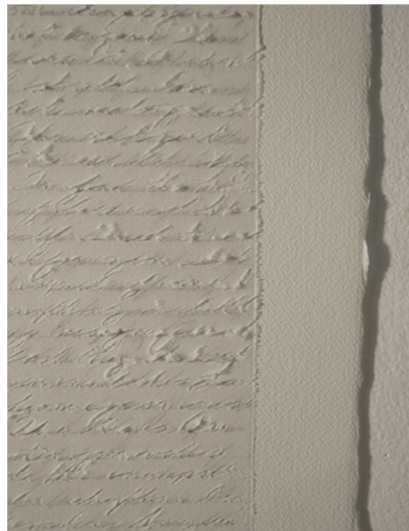
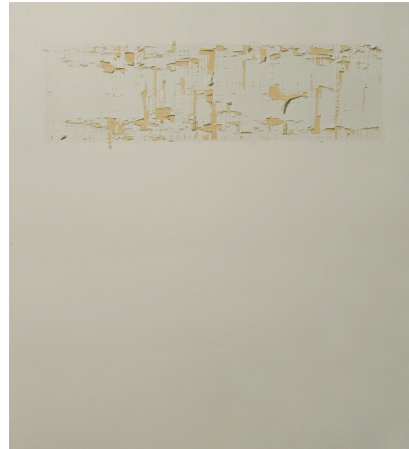
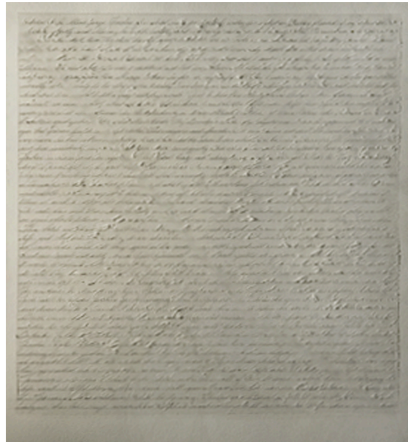


Fig.4 - Manifest(o) 2006

Fig.5 - Wahyn-did 2006

Fig.6 - Manifest(o) (detail)

Fig.7 - Wahyn-did (detail)



Fig. 8
ed-it-ed 2007

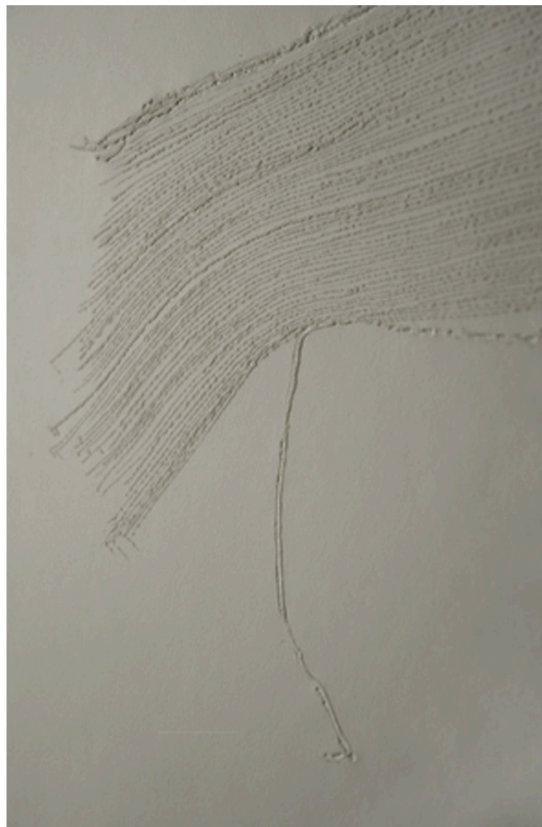


Fig. 9
...3 (detail)

Sarah Rebekah Byrd Mizer

Education

Virginia Commonwealth University Candidate for Masters of Fine Arts May 2007 Glassworking
 New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, NY Bachelor of Fine Arts 2003 Three
 Dimensional Studies

Exhibitions

2007

"Lucid" Graduate Thesis Show Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA

"Radius 250" Artspace, Richmond, VA

2006

"I Mean C'mon, Fluff My Pillow" Inns of Virginia, Richmond, VA

"The Goods" Gallery 5 - Richmond VA

"Re-Pressed" Gallery 5 - Richmond VA

"Contexture" Chapel Gallery – Providence RI

"W/E Exchange show" Claremont University Gallery - Claremont, CA

2005

"First Year Grad Show" – FAB Gallery- Richmond VA

2003

"Reservoir"- Exhibition Space – Alfred University

"Peaceful Territory" Robert Turner Gallery – Alfred, NY

2002

"Periphery" Cell Space – Alfred, NY

"Alfred Cooks" Chappell Gallery – Boston, MA

2001

"Glass/Sculpture" Exhibition Space – Alfred, NY

"I Love a Good Piece of Glass" Whitehouse Books, Corning, NY

2000

"Construct, Context, Code" Artsite – Wellsville, NY

Permanent Collections and Commissions

"Reservoir" slumped glass, flax paper on permanent collection at Alfred University

Architectural Glass tiles commissioned by Terra Cotta Coffee House, Alfred, NY

Architectural Glass table commissioned by Weathersby Guild Richmond, VA

Denise Pellitier – glass components for exhibition at Garth Clark Gallery, NY

Scholarships and Awards

2006-2007 VCU Dept of Craft/Material Studies Pollack-Krasner Grant

2006 VCU Dept of Craft/Material Studies Graduate Teaching Assistantship

2006 Haystack Mountain School of Crafts – Work-study scholarship

2002 Anderson Ranch Arts Center – summer workshop scholarship

1999-2003 Leadership Grant Alfred University